

A STUDY OF AISIYIAH IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN BANTEN PROVINCE: ITS IDEOLOGY, WORKS, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Aisyiyah, as one of the Islamic women organizations, in improving the status of women in Banten province. As an organization that has been established for almost a century Aisyiyah has given great and influential contributions toward the women's development. This study focus on the ideology that Aisyiyah convey in running its organization, which is based on the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW). The data were taken from the interview with the members of Aisyiyah Banten organization, publication, and documentation. The techniques used to collect the data were through in-depth interview, survey, and participatory observation. According to Aisyiyah men and women are equal in sight of Allah and have the same obligation in committing goodness. In doing its activities Aisyiyah keeps the slogan *amal ma'ruf nahi munkar* (commanding the goods and forbidding evil) based on the Holy Qur'an and Hadith. Aisyiyah has focused its activity in many sectors as education, health, and social welfare which are considered as women's domain. During its development Aisyiyah has faced many challenges due to the social and political condition in the society. Lack of cadres, slow regeneration process, and its relationship with Muhammadiyah organization, as its parent organization, are among those challenges.

Keywords: *aisyiyah, organization, the holy qur'an, hadith*

A. INTRODUCTION

Women movement has become important issue in the discussion of women studies. The aim of this movement was mainly to deliberate women from subordinated, repressed, and marginalized position toward an equal position with men (Hasyim, 2010). Especially in the 1960s this issues became a comprehensive discourse in the United States of America. The discourse of women movement was actually could not be separated from the long history of the same women movement which had been developing from the 17th to 18th century in the west and European countries. This women movement also took place in some of the Middle East countries, such as Egypt, Turkey, and Syria. There were many factors why this movement emerged at that time. Imperialism, colonialism, and the phenomenon of

the new nation-states were among the reasons why this movement came into view. Basically the emergence of women movement aimed to improve the status and the quality of human, especially women. It also stresses that both men and women have the same access to achieve better lives through any aspects of life.

In Indonesia the human's development including men and women, is also given high priority by the current government. It is stated in the President Joko Widodo's *Nawacita* program, in the term of improving the quality of the Indonesian citizens through the sector of education and economic sectors (Kompas, 2014). In Banten province (one of province in Indonesia, used to be a part of West Java province), the women development has been given special attention since the first female governor in Indonesia was elected in 2007 through direct election. This special moment has led to a wider path for women in Banten to have a greater chance to participate actively in public sectors. Ratu Atut Chosiyah, the name of the first female governor from Banten, then has become the symbol of women empowerment in Banten. Numbers of program and activities then implemented to support women development in Banten. The programs were organized by Banten province government and also by women organizations including Islamic women organizations.

As a province which is known with its religious territory, Banten is home to many Islamic Organizations. Women wing of these organizations play a key role in improving the status of women's life. In particular, these women organization have specific programs which focus on women. In other word, they aim to empower women. The activities range from the involvement in the national family planning program to assisting women who experienced domestic violence to supporting women's participation in politics (Arnez, 2010). One of these Islamic women organizations is Aisyiyah. Aisyiyah is Islamic women organization which is affiliated with Muhammadiyah, a modernist and reformist Islamic organization which demands a "return" to the fundamental truth of the Islamic texts and tradition, as articulated in the Holy Qur'an and *Hadith*. Besides strengthening Islamic values through religious activities, this women organization also tends to improve the well-being and status of Muslim women in Indonesia through education, health, and social welfare.

Talking about the Islamic women organization, in the last two decades, the rise of Islamic feminism has been developing in some of Islamic countries in the world. This new social movement promotes the idea of gender equality and justice based on the *Tafseer* of the Holy Quran and The *Hadith* (the sayings of The Prophet Muhammad SAW). This movement considers that religion to be one of the strongest weapons to improve women's conditions, justice for all, and equality between men and women. It is quite different from the feminism that comes from the west, that is the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of both man and woman, which is not generally based on the Islamic tradition or values (Doorn-Harder, 2006).

Aisyiyah was born from the body of Muhammadiyah organization that historically had branches for women, providing female members with opportunities to be active as preachers and teachers. Through its development, Aisyiyah has become an independent body of organization which is organized by females. Through its offices in all of Indonesia's provinces these organizations have created enormous networks that promote religious learning and social and political activism. Its educational facilities and networks have become venues for upward mobility available to all strata of society. Since its birth in 1917 until now Aisyiyah was deeply involved in the sociopolitical and historical evolution of Indonesian society, which in turn colored the structure, ideology, and activities of the organization.

Based on the explanation above, this study will be focus on the study of Aisyiyah as Islamic women organization in the context of Islamic feminism in Banten province. The writer wants to explore more about the ideology of Aisyiyah in performing gender equality and how it implements the gender equality in the social works. This study also wants to reveal the challenges that Aisyiyah Banten has faced related to the organization dynamic as well as social and political situation. More specifically this research is aimed (1) To define the idea of gender equality of Aisyiyah in Banten province, (2) To describe the implementation of Aisyiyah's idea on gender equality in its social activities in Banten province, and (3) To describe the challenges that Aisyiyah faces in performing gender equality in Banten province.

Accordingly, there are at least three reasons why this topic is important to be studied. The first, Aisyiyah has long history in its development and its presence has gone along with the development of the nation. It also has agenda to improve the

quality and well-being of women. The second, Banten province is a religious territory, which is the majority of the population is Muslim. There are many women scholars as well as intellectual of Islam who are the product of *pesantern*. These women know about Islamic teachings and transfer their knowledge by certain ways. The third, Aisyiyah has the structure of organization which ranges from national, provincial, district, subdistrict and local levels. This will be a great potential for women development programs.

B. METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative approach. The main focus of the study is the Aisyiyah's activities and ideology in promoting muslim women community in Banten province. This research was conducted in the Serang city Banten province. It was done around January 2016. There were 5 participants in this research. The participants are members of Aisyiyah Banten board of organization in the 2015-2020 of service period. The data in this research were taken from three sources, they were interview from the members of Aiyiyah, publication, such as from books, articles, previous research results, related to Aiyiyah studies, and official documents from the Aisyiyah organization, such as the organization's baylaws. The data collected through depth-interview, survey, and participatory observation. Data were analyzed by using the interpretational analysis technique. That was through the process of segmenting the database, developing categories, coding segments, grouping the segments, and drawing conclusions (Gall & Borg, 2003).

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Founded in 1917 with the name *Sopo Tresno* and renamed in 1920 as Aisyiyah (the name was inspired by Prophet Muhammad's wife Aisha), it is the first major Islamic feminist organization in Indonesia. One of the largest women's groups in the country, Aisyiyah is dedicated to the full engagement of women in religion, state, and society. Affiliated with the modernist Indonesian Islamic Organization, Muhammadiyah, Aisyiyah works closely with its parent organization in the areas of social, educational, and health care programs throughout Indonesia. Aisyiyah's central officers are located in Yogyakarta and Jakarta.

According to the identity, vision, and mission of Aisyiyah, the organization is committed to facilitating the dignity of women in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Along with the other women's movements in Indonesia, this organization too strives to represents women's interest, not only through education but also by struggles aimed at women's empowerment. Aisyiyah identity has evolved in response to the challenges it faced within the mainstream patriarchal society of the country that was battered by democratization and waves of modernization during the twentieth century.

Aisyiyah Banten officially is located at Komplek BTN Baladika Rt/Rw. 010/015 Drangong, Taktakan, Serang – Banten province. Aisyiyah is an autonomous body of Muhammadiyah organization. It is an Islamic movement that is to preach, to enjoin good and to forbid the evil that is based on Islamic values and sourced to the Holy Qur'an and *Hadith*. Aisyiyah has two visions; the ideal vision and the developmental vision. The ideal vision of organization is upholding the religion of Islam and the establishment of the Islamic community in truth. Meanwhile, the developmental vision is the achievement of the businesses' Aisyiyah towards the reinforcement and development of the good and prohibiting evil propaganda and more quality to the civil society. Aisyiyah's mission is embodied in the form of charitable efforts, programs, and activities, including (Aisyiyah, t.thn.):

1. Instill confidence, deepen and broaden the understanding, improve practice and disseminate the teachings of Islam in all aspects of life.
2. Increase the value and dignity of women in accordance with Islamic teachings.
3. Improve the quality and quantity assessment of the teachings of Islam.
4. Promoting the faith, strengthening and uplifting worship, as well as heightening the strong characters.
5. Enhance the spirit of worship, fighting in way of Allah, do alms, do charity, grants, build and maintain places of worship and other charitable efforts.
6. Developing Muhammadiyah new generation to be a pioneer, a successor, and a falsifier of the Aisyiyah's movement.
7. Improve the education, develop the culture, expand the science and technology, and stimulate the research.
8. To promote economic and entrepreneurship toward improving the quality of life.
9. Improving and developing the activities in the fields of social, public welfare, health, and the environment.

10. To promote and to seek the law enforcement, justice and truth, and to foster a spirit of unity and the national unity.
11. To improve the communication, brotherhood, cooperation in various fields and between domestic and public domains.
12. Other attempts in accordance with the aims and objectives of the organization.

In 2015 Aisyiyah Banten has selected the provincial level new leaders for the next five year period (2015-2020). The composition of the new provincial leaders consists of a chairman, vice chairman, secretary, treasurer and the chairman of the entire assemblies/institutions. The board of leaders is presented below:

Table 1. Board of Aisyiyah Banten Leaders of the 2015-1020 Period

| CORE LEADERS | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Chair | Dra. Ima Ni'mah, M.Pd |
| Vice Chairman | Dra. Hulaiyah, M.Ag. |
| Vice Chairman | Dr. Hunainah, M.M. |
| Vice Chairman | Dra. Hj. Siti Hawilah, M.Pd. |
| Vice Chairman | Dra. Hj. Euis Cholisoh Tirmidhi Abduh |
| Secretary | Mazia Amalia, M.Psi. |
| Deputy Secretary | Evi Avicenna Agustin, S.SiT, M.K.M. |
| Treasurer | Ir. Hj. Sri Mulyati, M.M. |
| Deputy Treasurer | Astuti Ambarwati, S.Pd. |
| MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND CONCURRENTLY AS CHAIRMAN OF THE INSTITUTION: | |
| Assembly <i>Tabligh</i> (Islamic preaching) | Dedeh Hermila, S.Pd. |
| Chief of Primary and Secondary Education | Isye Yogaswati, S.Pd.I. |
| The Chairman of the Health Assembly | Maryama Husni |
| The Chairman of the Social Welfare Council | dr. Hj. Faizah Syukri |
| The Chairman of the Economic and Employment Council | Hj. Enong Yustianti, S.Ag. |
| The Chairman of Cadre Development | Dra. Jahriah, M.M. |
| The Chief of Justice and Human Rights Council | Dra. Hj. Rosyati, M.Pd. |
| Chairman of the Institute for Research and Development | Jumiati, S.SiT, M.K.M. |
| Chairman of the Institute of Culture | Dra. Nurlaela, M.Pd. |
| The Chairman of the Institute for Environment and Disaster Management | Oom Romlah, S.Ag. |

1. Gender Equality According to Aisyiyah Ideology

In its general principle Aisyiyah has stated its ideology on gender equality. In general, Aisyiyah point of view on gender equality is based on what the Holy Qur'an has stated. The Holy Qur'an views that men and women are equal in front of Allah. Only the most righteous who is the most noble in sight of Allah (Q:S Al-Hujarat: 13). The basic foundation of Aisyiyah ideology was based on the concern of Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan (The founder of Muhammadiyah organization) of the importance of female education. He had a serious concern about the backward social status of Muslim women. For that reason, in 1917, Dahlan and his wife initiated the establishment of Aisyiyah in order to promote women's position. His hope was that Aisyiyah would help the Muhammadiyah by acting as a partner in conveying the Muhammadiyah's ideas on Islamic reform to women, in particular those dealing with matters of concern to women. Ideologically, the formation of Aisyiyah was based on Ahmad Dahlan's belief that women and men are equal in the eyes of God; both have the same obligation to society and to serve God's Will:

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give alms and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise (Qur'an At-Taubah: 71).

Aisyiyah views men and women are equal in front of Allah. Both men and female have the same rights and obligations in front of Allah in performing ritual worships or social activities. Even though both men and women have equal position in the sight of Allah, women have special obligation when it comes into their role as wives. In this sense, women must not forget their God given-nature (*takdir*) which makes them slightly different from men to some extents. This view is also parallel with the view of men and women equality which is proposed by what so called Islamist feminism. These women are connected by their strong commitment to Islam. Their point of reference is the Holy Qur'an's saying that Islam brings mercy for all creatures and frees human beings from any oppression and discrimination due to sex, race, and ethnicity (Q:S Al-Anbiya:107).

In viewing gender equality between men and women, Aisiyiah tends to be less conservative compared to the other women organizations which are not based on Islamic values. This particular women organization demands the equality between men and women in all aspects of life without any boundary. Aisiyiah, in other words, follows the Islamic values which are stated in the Holy Qur'an that the equality between men and women cannot be separated from its distinctive context. There are two concepts related to women according to Holy Qur'an: (1) equality concept; this concerns things related to general cases such as worship practices, human identity, and the human's origin, (2) inequality concept; this concerns things related to exceptional cases such as marriage and domestic life (Hasyim, 2010).

For example, women as wives must obey their husband's command as long as it is in the path of virtue, otherwise they must be given admonition by their husbands. As wives, women must ask permission to their husband whenever they leave homes and they must prioritize their family. Besides, the husbands are permitted to do polygamy (having more than one wife with specific requirement) which women are not. But on the other hand, Islam also perceives women as individuals who have the same right as men. If the women do goodness, then Allah will give them reward exactly similar to what the men do. Islam also ensures men and women to achieve the ultimate piety. Furthermore, Aisiyiah keeps the Holy Qur'an and *Hadith* as the norm of organization. In Islam, the Holy Qur'an is the highest authority which is believed by Muslim people as their way of life and is kept sacred and pure ever since it was revealed to the prophet Muhammad until now and hereafter. Islam comes to liberate humans from any kinds of injustice and to enhance noble character. Islam ensures the women's rights free from any kinds of discrimination and domination. The relationship between men and women in terms of gender relation is based upon the Holy Qur'an's verses which have ultimate goals to embody values of justice and virtue (Q:S, An-Nahl:90), security and peace (Q:S, An-Nisa:58), and commanding the good and forbidding evil (Q:S, Ali Imran:104) (Subhan, 2015).

2. Aisyiyah Works and Activities

Aisyiyah has aimed to make Islamic society a reality for women and to revive the Indonesian spirit of Islam through performing all types of work that are suitable (*pantas*) and profitable (*bergoena*) for women (doorn-harder, 2006). In order to achieve its goals, Aisyiyah carries out a number of activities in order to realize the teaching of Islam and to work towards the advancement of the status and position of the Indonesian Muslim women in the family as well as in society. Aisyiyah, as a women's organization, stresses activities concerning the problems of women as a means to improve the status of women as a mother, a wife, and as a member of the society. These activities provide guidance in such fields as education, health, social welfare, economic sectors and other activities related to the improvement of women's skills. By combining religious, educational, social, and health work, Aisyiyah has developed into an organization that took care of women, children, and the elderly. Through its educational and social projects, it poured and modeled the ideal of how to be a pious Muslim woman (doorn-harder, 2006).

In Aisyiyah Banten every programs are executed under each assembly which have ten assemblies as follows: (1) Assembly of *Tabligh* (Islamic preaching), (2) Assembly of primary and secondary education, (3) The health assembly, (4) The social welfare assembly, (5) The assembly of economic and employment, (6) The assembly of cadre development, (7) The assembly justice and human rights, (8) The institute for research and development, (9) The institute of culture, (10) The institute for environment and disaster management (Susunan Pimpinan, t.thn.).

One of the programs, which is currently executed by Aisyiyah Banten is under the health assembly. The program is called the accompaniment for the Tuberculosis and HIV suspects. Members or cadres of Aisyiyah in collaboration with the health ministry give accompaniment and counseling to the suspects. The HIV issue has become the concerns of Aisyiyah since it is related to the reproduction health. As we all know that one of the promulgation of the HIV virus is through sexual intercourse which involves man and women in legal relationship through the marriage bond (Hasyim, 2010). Meanwhile, for the

Tuberculosis suspects there are still many people do not aware about this disease which requires delicate and painstaking treatment. The program of health care is also one of the main programs that Aisyiyah Banten.

In the field of health care, Aisyiyah is aware that due to the low level of education, particularly among the women, in the villages, there is inadequate understanding and insufficient awareness among them of health problems. Superstitious beliefs also inhibit attempts to improve health conditions by modern means (IT, 2005).

Aisyiyah also gives special emphasis on the education program which conveys formal and informal education. It was the concern of the founder of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, who was also the founder of Muhammadiyah organization, about the importance of female education. Dahlan's aspiration to educate women was expressed further in the formation of a religious training group for female laborers working in the many *batik* (painted fabric with specific patterns) home industries around Kauman district Yogyakarta where he lived at that time. The group was known as *Sopo Tresno* (Javanese phrase meaning: anyone who loves). Its purpose was to encourage women to love learning reading writing as well as studying Islam. Later, this *Sopo Tresno* became the embryo of Aisyiyah organization and has been developing its program on education into wider spectrums. Not only teaching Islamic values but also teaching general and public knowledge.

All involved in Aisyiyah programs on education are in a process of continuous learning and on their way to become preachers and missionaries of Islam. To instill a Muhammadiyah spirit in children and students is the main goal. Formal education is an important mission for the family, for their organization, and for Islam. It creates the future cadres. It helps preserve unified teachings about gender roles, morality, modernity, and the vision and mission of Muhammadiyah ideology. In the end, it preserves the family and helps reach the goal of Islamizing society. Schools are the organization's strongest point. Muhammadiyah allows Aisyiyah only to operate schools deemed appropriate to women's *kodrat* (God-given innate nature). These are preschools, the Mu'allimat school (girls' school), and the colleges for nurses and midwives (doorn-harder, 2006).

The teaching of Islamic principles as well as the teaching of Muhammadiyah organization has become the part of curriculum in every Aisyiyah schools. In Banten province respectively according to the chair of Aisyiyah Banten, Ima Ni'mah, there are 53 kindergartens which are called Bustanul Athfal kindergarten, 13 playgroups, 1 children day care, 2 The Holy Qur'an reading center for children, 5 Madrasah Diniyah (Islamic Elementary School), 1 public library, and 1 college for nurse and midwife.

Other education program in the informal sector is *Pengajian*. *Pengajian* has become one of the main focuses in every Aisyiyah activity since it can enhance the role of women in society. A *Muballighat* (Islamic woman preacher) usually teaches at certain *pengajian*. Many of them specialize in certain aspects such as The Holy Qur'an teachings, Islamic Law, mother and children health, formal education, and any other topic. In Aisyiyah Banten, the topic discussion is usually about the Holy Qur'an teachings and Islamic law. It tries to strengthen the Islamic foundation of the *jamaah* (the followers of the *pengajian*). There are two kinds of *pengajian*: internal and external *pengajian*. For the internal *pengajian*, the followers are usually come from the members of Aisyiyah. Meanwhile, for the external *pengajian*, the followers come not only from the member of Aisyiyah itself but also from the public. The *pengajian* is usually held once a week or twice a week. In other occasion it can be held based on a certain event.

The preacher is also the member or cadre of Aisyiyah itself. The preacher is usually comes from the *Tabligh* (Islamic preaching) assembly. The chair of Aisyiyah Banten also encourages all the members or cadres of Aisyiyah can be the preacher at least for the internal Aisyiyah *pengajian*. It is part of the development program of human resources that Aisyiyah has. Van doorn-harder says that:

Pengajian sessions are among the most popular social-religious events in Indonesia and reflect the reality that large populations in Indonesia still do not rely on the printed word but transmit knowledge orally. Sessions are held weekly, monthly, or on other schedules, and their level can vary from simple Qur'an recitation to high-level *pengajian* for the preachers themselves or academic lectures for teachers at Muhammadiyah universities. Women preachers tend to cater to women's groups but also

speak to mixed audiences. The content is always a religious message, sometimes combined with a discussion about health, birth control, or social problems such as prostitution or drug abuse (doorn-harder, 2006).

Aisyiyah Banten usually holds *pengajian* at a certain mosque, the Aisyiyah's school the head quarter's office of Aisyiyah Banten, or a community building. Members of Aisyiyah organize the study session including the topic of *pengajian* and take turns serving snacks and drinks. The session starts with greetings, upon which all present recite the *Fatihah*, (the beginning verse of the Holy Qur'an). The preacher then recites in Arabic the text that will be the topic discussed during the study meeting. In the Aisyiyah model of teaching Islam, setting up a *pengajian rutin* group is considered the heart of its mission and organizational life. How often it meets is not as important as the fact that it meets at regular intervals.

Sometimes there are only few followers who attend the *pengajian* while in other occasion the followers could fill the whole room. *Pengajian* can be a series that discusses parts or topics of the Holy Qur'an, faith, and dogma, or it can follow the annual cycle of Muslim feasts. During a feast, *pengajian* are held to discuss and explain what the particular celebration commemorates. All the activities in *pengajian* are held under the *Tabligh* (Islamic preaching) assembly. Its activities are related to the programs for preaching Islam through the founding of *pengajian*, the upgrading of *mubalighat* (women preachers), developing the character of Muslim women, and publishing a manual on how to improve the happiness of families (*Keluarga Sakinah*, literally means tranquility) (IT, 2005).

3. Aisyiyah's Challenges in Running the Organization

As one of the oldest and biggest women Muslim organization Aisyiyah has been through various sociological and political situation in the country. As it has been known that Aisyiyah organization has established before the independence of the nation. The effort and the struggle of the organization nevertheless have adjusted with the current political and sociological condition. Aisyiyah has tried to answer and gave service to the community in whatever current situation was happening in the country. Aisyiyah is one of the women organizations that are quite stable and firm to cope with any situation and current

condition of the government. That is why since its establishment until now (almost a hundred year old) Aisyiyah is still fixed stand firm to serve the women and the society to reach a prosperous life of Indonesian women.

Aisyiyah Banten has faced particular challenges during its development. From the data finding analysis it is found that the challenges are categorized into two parts; there are internal and external challenge. Internal challenge is something related to the organization dynamic, while external challenge is something related to sociological situation where Aisyiyah delivers its programs.

Aisyiyah Banten must work hard to give understanding to the member of society that this organization focuses on social work and Islamic teaching in general, not on a specific stream of Islam. This is the hardest challenge that Aisyiyah Banten is facing now. People in Banten are not quite familiar with Muhammadiyah organization (which is the parent organization of Aisyiyah). It cannot be denied that Aisyiyah is closely related to Muhammadiyah organization. It is also true that Aisyiyah still depends on Muhammadiyah whenever it concerns some strategic decisions. In fact, all decisions made by Aisyiyah, especially those made at conferences, have to be formally approved by Muhammadiyah, and this includes election results. Clearer statement about the dependency of Aisyiyah on Muhammadiyah is as follows:

Although 'Aisyiyah is the woman's branch of a larger organization, 'Aisyiyah cannot make its own decisions when it comes to the important fields of politics and religious laws. For this they must follow decisions made by the Muhammadiyah, consisting solely of men (IT, 2005).

Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912. Its main goal was to preach, teach, and explain Islam in accordance with the original sources and to purify the religion from non-Islamic elements (doorn-harder, 2006). Like other reformist groups, Muhammadiyah preached against many of the practices of traditionalist scholars of Islam. The reformist message proved successful, especially in its emphasis on education. Rituals followed by traditionalists are local, while reformists aim at globalizing the Muslim faith.

That Muhammadiyah and the traditionalist emerged out of different sources affected their approaches to several central areas of Islamic religious life. They were distinguished by their methods of interpretation of religious texts and

in several matters of worship and ritual and practices. Their organizational and educational models also differ, and these variables influence the general way of thinking and behavior of respective Muhammadiyah or traditionalist. Most of Banten people are traditionalist in their religious root. They usually practice the religious rituals which differ from Muhammadiyah's people do. So, when Aisyiyah's cadres or members come to the society to deliver its programs, most of the women usually withdraw themselves because of the label of Aisyiyah or Muhammadiyah.

This actually gives both positive and negative effect for the Aisyiyah Banten respectively. This situation can encourage the cadres to promote Aisyiyah in the society and give the correct understanding about the organization profile. But in other side, it will hamper the programs of the organization to some extent. Some members even have to covert the label of Aisyiyah every time it runs its programs to invite the participation of the public. Actually the society very welcome to the organization's programs as long as it does not correlate with the label of Muhammadiyah.

Another challenge might come from the internal organization. The regeneration has become the biggest problem. Aisyiyah is lack of cadres or members who really want to fight for the organization. Most of the cadres or members are career women, who have their own job and profession. The internal consolidation is weak and it makes some programs do not run properly. It is very concerned since Aisyiyah actually has many good programs to improve the welfare of the women. Since the cadres or members that Aisyiyah Banten are very limited, some cadres or members even have to concurrent double positions. One cadre or member can have a vice chairman position at the provincial level (*Pimpinan Wilayah Aisyiyah*) and a chair of Islamic Public Speaking Assembly at the regional and municipal level at the same time.

Talking about regeneration, in the past, new members could be drawn from Nasyyatul Aisyiyah (NA), which was part of Aisyiyah between 1931 and 1965. After it became independent, however, NA slowly drifted away from the mother organization. On a day-to-day basis, NA must cope with its own problems, and its members will no longer automatically join Aisyiyah when they

reach a certain age. As a note, the membership of Aisyiyah starts at the age of 40s and above.

To intensify the search for new membership, Aisyiyah Banten has also tried to bring around an old Muhammadiyah tradition of opening dorms for female university students. In Banten province, it is already done with the college for nurse and midwifery students. Its main goal is to prepare cadres of young women of high quality and high morals with the sufficient knowledge of Islam. The graduates will be intellectuals who are also female preachers. Students come from all around Banten province to study full-time at the college and follow the religious program at the dorm. The students must spend their time at the dorm at least for six months. They also actively promote Aisyiyah in their hometowns. The experiment seems to be resulting excellent students with a deep commitment to Muhammadiyah and eventually these students are hoped to join the Aisyiyah as the future cadres or members.

D. CONCLUSION

The establishment of Aisyiyah was intended to promote Indonesian Muslim women and to strive to return Indonesian Muslim women (*Muslimat*) to the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. This cannot be separated from its parent organization, Muhammadiyah, in which Aisyiyah used to be a part of it. Muhammadiyah was considered as a reformist Islamic organization in the sense that it tried to return to the fundamental truth of the Islamic texts and tradition, as articulated in the Qur'an and *Hadith*. As Islamic women organization, Aisyiyah has set its foundation based on the teaching of The Holy Qur'an and al Hadith. Their aim is to improve the position of women were formed on the basis of religion, community and ethnic groups. According to their ideology, women have the same right to get access to education as well as to other public sectors. Men and women have the same right to do goodness and to do social activities. This thought is based on what the Holy Qur'an has said that men and women are partners who have responsibility to remind each other to do the right things and to forbid the wrong thing that Islam has ordered (At-Taubah : 71). One important thing to highlight that in performing the activities women must understand and realize their *kodrat* (God given inner-nature), including their *kodrat* as mothers and wives.

Aisyiyah seem to have had a significant effect on women, not only with regard to increasing their role in development, but also particularly by emphasizing the importance of their education in the family and by stressing their role as the mothers. Aisyiyah has come to fulfill the basic need of the women through education, social sector, and health sector. Those are also concerning the basic concept of women as care taker in their house. Aisyiyah has been through many periods of government yet to survive in serving women in Banten. There are many kindergartens, schools, college, public learning center, and Islamic preaching centers that are run and organized by Aisyiyah. Aisyiyah Banten also has made several collaborations with other institution such as with the government or non-profit organization to run its program such as in health sector. One of the biggest agenda in providing health service to the society is through accompaniment for the Tuberculosis and HIV suspects.

Even though Aisyiyah has faced challenges in term of regeneration of its cadres and lack of human resources, it keeps striving to keep the dynamic of the organization alive. Many attempts have been made to maintain and invite new members for the new cadres of the organization. One of the attempts is through the dormitory founding for the students of nursery and midwifery college. It is hoped that the students will be graduated with adequate skills as a nurse or a midwife as well as with *ahlaqul karimah* (having capacity of a good Muslim). Also its position as autonomous organization has been another challenge for Aisyiyah Banten. Aisyiyah Banten must work hard to change the fallacious understanding in the society that presumed Aiyiyah or Muhammadiyah is a new religion stream. Aisyiyah is an organization that concerns about women condition in the society, especially in education and social sectors. This is the upcoming challenge for the future cadres and members to prepare themselves to be the agents of Aisyiyah as part of a reformist organization. In the future, Aisyiyah cadres and members have to give enlightenment to society about its organization' religious principles, ideals, and goals.

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